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US Congress Holds Hearing on Oil Dependence

By Leta Hong Fincher

Washington

23 March 2007

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The U.S. Congress has held a hearing Thursday on how rising global demand for oil is affecting U.S. national security. Some lawmakers and energy experts say America's dependence on oil imports limits the ability of the United States to meet its foreign policy goals. VOA's Leta Hong Fincher has more.

In his opening address, the Democratic Party chairman of the [House Foreign Affairs Committee](#), Tom Lantos, warned that oil revenues are permitting producer countries such as Iran and Venezuela to pursue policies that oppose U.S. interests.

Lantos said the world's dependence on oil has "handicapped" U.S. efforts to use diplomacy to end Iran's quest for nuclear arms. "Iran continues to cut lucrative deals with other countries involving its energy sector, which directly benefits Tehran's quest for nuclear weapons."

The former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, John Deutch, agreed. Deutch testified that Iran may interrupt its production of 2.5 million barrels of oil per day if sanctions are imposed for its nuclear activities.

Deutch also said Venezuela's oil profits have allowed it to pursue anti-American and anti-democratic policies. Deutch is now a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He said the United States currently depends largely on oil imported from the Middle East.

Tom Lantos

But he said the world will become increasingly dependent on oil imports from Africa. "It is important that this country [the United States] encourage good governance in these countries as they produce their oil. It's very important, not only because it will improve the social and economic circumstances of the citizens of these countries, but also by providing good governance, you will have stability, which will permit oil production that will serve the world's needs."

Congressman Lantos said that China has become particularly aggressive in its pursuit of oil in western African countries such as Angola and Sudan. "To feed its growing energy needs, China scouts the globe for sources of oil and has come to rely increasingly on supplies from Africa, including Sudan. Is it any wonder that China has been a stubborn impediment to international efforts to pressure Khartoum into bringing its genocide in Darfur to an end?"

Former CIA Director Deutch said that to reduce American dependence on oil imports, the U.S. government may need to adopt politically unpopular measures such as a tax on gasoline and other petroleum products. "Adopting such a tax would provide not only a dampening of the demand for petroleum products, it would also provide a price signal for the private sector of the need to introduce new technologies that do not rely on petroleum," he said.

Deutch also said that government incentives are needed to stimulate research and development of alternatives to petroleum.

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